Center City District

Fact Sheet



Visitors relax among the tulips at Dilworth Park, with City Hall and one of the glass concourse entrances in the background.

Dilworth Park Overview

Dilworth Park is a vibrant, open space that serves as a welcoming urban gathering place and a critical gateway to the city's public transportation system. Its modern design, seasonal programming, and access to transit have made Dilworth Park one of Philadelphia's most beloved public spaces since its transformation.

Size: Approximately 2.5 acres

Location: 1 South 15th Street (west side of City Hall)

Original Opening: 1979

Renovation Completed: 2014

100 S. Broad Street, Ste. 1N
Philadelphia, PA 19110

Historical Background

William Penn's Original Vision

The site of Dilworth Park traces back to one of Philadelphia's foundational moments. In 1682, William Penn designated this area as Centre Square, one of five original public squares in his plan for Philadelphia. Penn envisioned Centre Square as the geographic and social heart of his "greene countrie towne," bordered by four smaller public squares, known today as Rittenhouse Square, Washington Square, Franklin Square, and Logan Square.

Evolution of the Site

Centre Square never fully realized Penn's original vision as the city's social center, but the land remained in public use. Over the centuries, the site served many purposes including a public park, racecourse, military campground, and the location of the nation's first large-scale municipal waterworks. In 1871, construction began on City Hall at this location, fundamentally transforming the space.

The Transit Hub Era

In 1881, the Pennsylvania Railroad constructed Broad Street Station immediately west of City Hall. At its peak, Broad Street Station was one of the largest passenger train terminals in the country. The station was demolished in 1953 as rail travel declined and more modern underground transit took precedence.

Original Dilworth Plaza (1977)

In the 1970s, architect Vincent Kling designed Dilworth Plaza, a multilevel concrete plaza built over the underground transit concourse and named in honor of former Mayor Richardson Dilworth. However, the plaza was underutilized due to its multilevel hardscape design that pedestrians found unwelcoming.

Transformation to Dilworth Park (2014)

Center City District undertook a $55 million transformation of the plaza, working with KieranTimberlake, Urban Engineers, and OLIN landscape architects, and with financial support from more than 50 public, foundation, and private funders. Planning and design for the renovation began in 2007; the official groundbreaking took place in January 2012, and the park officially opened in September 2014. The transformation converted the barren concrete plaza into a sustainable, green, accessible public space that honors the site's history while meeting the needs of modern urban life.



The original Dilworth Plaza, prior to its transformation into Dilworth Park.


Concourse access

Key Elements

Design Concept

Dilworth Park was conceived as a high-quality gateway to public transit and a civic gathering place that serves the public through year-round programming, amenities, and activities. The original sunken plaza was raised to create an even surface, eliminating barriers and stairs while creating a roof over the improved transit concourse below.

Features

Glass Headhouses:
Two sloped glass pavilions serve as dramatic entrances to the city's largest underground transit hub. Constructed of laminated structural glass with minimal framework, the monumental headhouses bring natural light into the concourse below and provide shelter for commuters, while keeping iconic City Hall in full view to passersby.

Fountain & Rink:
The centerpiece of Dilworth Park is its play fountain featuring 241 zero-depth water jets. The fountain, which uses collected and purified rainwater, creates a popular and accessible cooling spot in summer; in winter, area transforms into an ice-skating rink.

Albert M. Greenfield Lawn:
A 6,900-square-foot great lawn provides a natural gathering space in the heart of the city and transforms into a festive winter garden during colder months.

Shade Trees & Landscaping:
Four tree groves with species conducive to urban settings (honey locust, black locust, katsura, and London plane) provide shade and define the park's perimeter. A pair of wide, curved planting beds put on a dramatic display each spring, when thousands of tulips bloom.

Movable Seating:
Tables, chairs, and benches throughout the park offer flexible seating arrangements.

Pathways:
Accessible walkways connect the park to surrounding streets without barriers.



Dilworth Park glass headhouses (top, far left), fountain (top, center) and Albert M. Greenfield Lawn (bottom).

Sustainability Elements

Rainwater Collection:
The fountain system collects and recycles rainwater for reuse.

Green Infrastructure:
Native and adapted plantings reduce irrigation needs.

LEED Considerations:
The renovation incorporated sustainable design principles throughout.

Food & Beverage

The park features multiple food and beverage options for park visitors and commuters. Dining establishments provide outdoor seating with views of the park and City Hall.



Headhouses bring light and protection from the elements to the SEPTA concourse below.



Dilworth Park's location and layout make it ideal for city celebrations.



The Patio at Dilworth Park is a relaxed space with an outdoor bar and casual menu.

Public Art & Historical Interpretation

Historical Panels

Interpretive panels displayed in glass cabinets along the Market Street walkway tell the story of the site's evolution, covering topics including William Penn's plan for Philadelphia, the Centre Square Water Works, the building of City Hall, industry and railroads, 20th century transformation, and Center City's resurgence.



Pulse (2018) by Janet Echelman

A site-specific public art installation located within the fountain footprint tracks the city's underground transit in real time, sending colorful dry mist upward from the fountain area at night as trains pass below.



Dilworth Quotes

"Yes, I am an emotional man and a fighter. Do you think there would be any cities if there were not men like me to fight for them? If elected, I'll be the best damned mayor Philadelphia ever had."

–Richardson Dilworth, 1955

"Some cynics say that our big cities should be eliminated, but you cannot have a lot of suburbs sprawled out in search of a city."

–Richardson Dilworth, 1958

"Before Dilworth was district attorney, no black assistant district attorney went into major courts as a trial lawyer. One second after he took office, centuries of oppression were wiped away by a man who put justice over political advantage."

–Judge A. Leon Higginbotham Jr.

"When Dick was DA, we hated it when it was time to go home. He made you feel ten feet tall."

–Samuel Dash

Park Namesake



Richardson Dilworth (1898-1974), Philadelphia's mayor from 1956 to 1962, took office at a time when the city was experiencing severe economic challenges and population decline. He championed urban revitalization efforts and made a point of living in Center City, encouraging others to do the same. The transformation of Dilworth Park from a foreboding sunken plaza into a thriving public space reflects Dilworth's vision for a dynamic, accessible urban center.

Dilworth Park features quotes by and about Richardson Dilworth (see page 6) etched into granite pavers at the park entrances.

Recognition & Impact



Dilworth Park has received widespread acclaim and awards for its design, sustainability, transit integration, and overall positive impact on Center City. Now a destination that welcomes more than 12 million visitors annually, the park is a model for how thoughtful urban design can create dynamic public spaces and strengthen connections between transit infrastructure and civic life.

Ownership & Operations

Ownership:
City of Philadelphia
(leased to Center City District)

Management, Programming & Maintenance:
Center City District

Visitor Information

Address:
1 South 15th Street, Philadelphia PA 19102

Hours:
Daily, 6 a.m. to 1 a.m.

Public Transit:
Direct elevator and stair access to SEPTA's Market-Frankford (L) Line, Broad Street (B) Line, and Subway-Surface Trolley (T) lines | Multiple SEPTA bus routes

Accessibility:
ADA accessible with no stairs or barriers from street level

Information Kiosk:
Staffed kiosk provides visitor information and maps

For information about seasonal operations, special events and rentals, and park programming, visit centercityphila.org or call 215.440.5500.